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9. On Compromises of Truth in Religious Teaching. A Lecture delivered in St. George's Catholic Cathedral, Southwark, on the evening of Sunday, June 22nd 1851

A. M. D. G.

A S E R M O N

DELIVERED AT

THE CONSECRATION

OF THE

RIGHT REV. DR. THOMAS JOSEPH BROWN,

Bishop of Appollonia, First Vicar Apostolic of Wales,

AT

THE CHURCH IN PIERREPOINT STREET, BATH,

ON THE FEAST OF SS. SIMON AND JUDE,

MDCCCXL.

BY NICHOLAS WISEMAN,

BISHOP OF MELIPOTAMUS.

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TO THE RIGHT REVEREND
THOMAS JOSEPH, BISHOP OF APPOLLONIA,
VICAR APOSTOLIC OF WALES.

MY DEAR LORD AND BROTHER,

AT your Lordship's request, I agreed, though conscious of my unfitness, to preach your Lordship's Consecration Sermon: at your Lordship's further request, I now allow this, with all its imperfections, to be published. In one respect I am thus a gainer. I have now the opportunity, before denied me by the sacredness of the office I discharged, of adding mine to the public voice, which unanimously applauds your Lordship's appointment as a wise measure, and hails it as a hopeful omen. Whatever, therefore, I may have said in the sermon of the concession of a separate Episcopacy to Wales, as of a blessing full of promise, I can safely, in this Dedication, extend to the choice made for its first Bishop.

Wishing your Lordship all health and happiness, I have the honour to be,

My dear Lord,

Your Lordship's faithful Friend and Brother in Christ,

NICHOLAS,

Bishop of Melipotamus.

*London, the Feast of
St. Charles Borromeo, 1840.*



A SERMON,

&c.

“For this cause I left thee in Crete, that thou should'st set in order the things that are wanting, and should'st ordain priests in every city, as I also appointed thee.”—TIT. 1, 5.

It is certainly, my Brethren, a consoling and encouraging occupation to a Catholic mind, to contemplate, after many centuries, the repetition of the same conduct, of the very same acts, by which the apostles propagated, confirmed, and perpetuated the Church of God. Nearly eighteen hundred years ago, St. Paul, seeing the island of Crete as yet but slightly acquainted with the true faith, devoid of priests who should make it known to sincere enquirers, or should perfect it in true believers, who could administer the sacraments to members of the Church, or bring back wanderers to its fold, knew of no better plan than to single out one on whose soundness of doctrine, virtuous life, zeal, and prudence, he could fully rely, appoint him bishop of the desolate tract, and leave to his exertions the ordering of whatever might seem wanting, and the appointment of subordinate ministers; in fact, the organization, government, and perfecting of its Church. And in all this he acted with a calm consciousness of a power from above, that needed no consultation to be had of temporal interests or their rulers, of the world or its masters. In like manner, the successor of

St. Peter, the occupier of the apostolic see, from his elevated watch-tower, whence the ample range of his paternal eye takes in the entire earth in its length and breadth, and dwells with exultation or compassion upon every smallest spot, had for a long time seen, and inwardly marked, the ample field for multiplied pastoral solicitude, which this our island contained. He saw many whom he would gladly number among his spiritual children, separated by distance of place, or by natural inaccessibility of territory, or by difference of speech, from the few seats of episcopal activity which our country possessed, and he judged the time had come for multiplying the shepherds, that the flock might be increased. He asked not for support from the arm of flesh ; he asked not for counsel from the wisdom of earth ; he trusted to the power committed to him long before any empire now existing had commenced, he acted upon the charter given him, in the first of his predecessors, 1800 years ago, upon the borders of the sea of Tiberias, "Feed my sheep :"—and he has among others, fixed his choice upon one, who, by his authority, is about to receive, in your presence, the imposition of hands, and the mysterious unction, by which he will be fully qualified for the discharge of his new commission.

How uniform, yet how majestic is the work of God ! What grandeur is there not in the repetition of such similar acts of power, at intervals not to be measured by the duration of earthly dynasties, yet all emanating from one single impulse, from one communication of omnipotent, immortal energy, the breath of the living God animating, from the beginning, his undying Church.

This consideration must necessarily cheer our hopes. Great events like this are great demonstrations of mercy ; they are visitations of graciousness. It is not in anger against us that new power and multiplied resources are given to the episcopal government amongst us, that means of

closer intimacy with their rulers are afforded to the people of God : that the benefits of concentrated zeal, of narrowed spheres of watchfulness, of more constant presence, of completer union between bishop and faithful, are doubled in measure, by the creation of a double number of apostolic vicariates.

But while we thus possess, in this new proof of divine goodness, an argument for confidence in its future guidance, it may not be amiss to calculate our gains also by the standard of human prudence, and see how far it will sanction and encourage our buoyant anticipations. When a traveller has reached a point in his path, which allows him to survey what he has already passed, and what yet remains of it, he may be indulged, if he pause awhile to compare the two. And if he shall seem to himself to discover that whereas the past was dark and cheerless, what lies before him is bright and smiling ; that while the former was rugged and dangerous, the latter is smooth and safe ; while the one was long and tedious, the other is short and pleasant ; surely no one will wonder if he assume new courage, and if his speed seem to add wings to his feet, and he go on his future way rejoicing. And such seems to me, my brethren, our present situation : a moment has come which allows us to contrast the past and the future to advantage, and learn from the experience of the one the reasonable expectations of the other.

It pleased God, among his other awful visitations of our offending country, to allow the light of true episcopacy, which in other nations was but hidden for a time, to be here extinguished. After that mournful event, great indeed and glorious were the efforts made by individual zeal, to struggle against the accumulating mass of adverse circumstances, and against the growing power of hostile activity. Exile, itself a grievous penalty, was but the necessary preparation to the contest in which it had to be engaged ; chains and racks,

death and infamy, were its ordinary close. Do I enumerate these things to awaken any bitter feelings? God forbid: but only that we may adore His ways, and bless His name for what He has done for us. In spite of these heroic struggles, in spite, too, of all the winning blandishments which an unrequited loyalty could employ, prejudice only deepened, oppression hardened, penal inflictions swelled, our prospects darkened, and our spark was well nigh trampled out from among our people. The crisis at length came. Royal ingratitude, public delusion, national phrenzy, reached their highest tide-flow in the belief and use of Oates's infamous conspiracy. Heaven could not but pity, in equal measure, the innocent victims that bled, and the noble heart of such a nation, duped into such blindness. Nay, the first, like Stephen, pleaded for the latter, and pleaded not in vain; and from thenceforth the stain of Catholic blood marked no more the earth, and blotted no further the code of this our country. The first dawn of light broke upon our prospects, the first pause for breathing was granted us. Our God took compassion upon his people; he determined to begin collecting the dispersed ones of Israel.

And how was this done? In the brief reign of a monarch, whose faults, rather than his virtues, have been the theme of history, a momentary intercourse was permitted by Divine Providence with the apostolic see. Momentary, indeed, it was—but yet sufficient to rekindle the torch of Austin at the unfailing fire which burns on the Apostle's tomb, faint at first, but ever since unextinguishable,—nursed with pain through the last century, to burst into double brightness in this. The salutary measure, in other words, for Catholicity in the reign of James, was the re-establishment of episcopacy, by the formation of the four vicariates till lately existing. Every other step taken by him for the restoration of the Catholic faith was cancelled, was annulled; we gained not a single endowment, not a college, not a church, by his zealous

endeavours. But we gained four poor and destitute bishops, men without state, without decent maintenance, without homes ; and this gift was worth all else he could have bestowed. For this alone he appears to have been raised up ;—the season for riper mercies was not yet come.

It does, indeed, appear singular, that although the succeeding reigns added frightful enactments, though short of death, to the inflictions of former ones on Catholics, none should have been directed to the checking or destroying of this yet infant institution. The former penal code had fearlessly contemplated the numerous detachments of missionaries, which our colleges and religious houses abroad yearly sent hither, and attempted nothing short of the extermination of all. Here were four individuals, marked by their station, important from their authority, chiefs and directors of the work ; whom worldly prudence would have pointed out as objects of signal and easy pursuit, as shepherds to be struck, that the sheep might be dispersed. Yet were no legislative measures taken for the purpose. True it is, that they suffered much tribulation, and some even exile ; but still their all-important agency seemed to be overlooked ; the policy of wily statesmen was, for the first time, at fault in the art of persecution. Certainly, from that hour, by the greater order and power of combination which from henceforward were communicated to the untiring zeal of a truly apostolic clergy, from the more fixed and parochial form which its ministry gradually assumed, still more from the divine blessing upon the institution founded expressly by the Son of God for this purpose, the foundation was laid of that moral strength and unprecedented increase, which in the end has broken down all obstacles, social and legal, and has placed our holy religion in a position more becoming its beauty and holiness.

There would seem to be this principal difference between the prudence of men's designs and the deep wisdom of pro-

vidential counsels, that the former will attain its end, and, perhaps, too, produce many accidental advantages ; while the latter, in a single stroke shall attain so many purposes, shall work such varied marvels of wisdom and of power, and each so complete and so sufficient, as that many will seem to see in each its proper object, and feel, in the effects that principally interest them, a sufficient reason for the whole. The one is like an edifice raised by human hands, which presents a front accurately finished, and leaves the rest to accidental arrangement ; while the other resembles rather the mountains of God, which, on whatever side viewed, whether craggy or smooth, barren or wooded, present features of grand design and majestic bearing, such as no art can dare to mimic. And thus it is to the Catholic mind considering the great events of the last half century, its terrible examples as well as its virtuous deeds, every one of which he sees had cause and motive enough in the benefits which an all-wise Disposer has thence extracted for His blessed religion. And narrowing the point of vision, the *English* Catholic may well believe, that the religious welfare of his country was the great view of Providence in the political convulsions which shook Europe, at the close of the last, and commencement of the present, century. It is difficult to imagine a possible cause, other than did occur, which would have induced the generation that preceded us to break up and abandon the magnificent establishments we possessed abroad : the clergy to quit for ever the sanctuaries and peaceful asylums which foreign hospitality had for three centuries afforded them, and which past and touching recollections had hallowed ; communities of peaceful, timid women to break simultaneously from their cloistered retreats, where all was their own, to wander in quest of some new shelter ; the tenants of religious houses to abandon them in a body, as by joint consent, and, in violation of existing laws, locate themselves in their own country. But one

sweeping revolution, and its consequent wars, cleared at once France, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Spain, and Portugal, of every one of our numerous foreign establishments, and concentrated, in their own despite, their power and resources on this their truest object.* The blow was felt as severe, as cruel; we thought the heaviest of all our trials was now coming. We seemed shipwrecked and lost: but soon we raised our head above the billow that had overwhelmed us, and felt the merciful hand that never has abandoned us, guiding us to our brightest hopes. We were shipwrecked indeed—but shipwrecked on our own shores; brought back by the tempest into our own homes. No tranquil sea, no favouring breeze could have done the work so speedily or so well. From this moment Catholicity has truly revived amongst us. Every district has provided itself with a seminary for ecclesiastical education, nearly equal to that which before supplied the entire kingdom; religious communities afford means, easy and accessible, of education to all classes of the community, and, by allowing closer investigation, dispel prejudices from the public mind. Thus have all those aids which the ecclesiastical polity of a country requires at hand, been brought within ours, and made to bear upon the one common end—the confirmation and propagation of religion.

And now all this has been done, and much more which I have not time to rehearse. The toilsome work of bearing down prejudice, of emerging from complicated difficulties, of establishing great and expensive instruments of public utility, has been accomplished. These are all now set in motion, after the slow preparation of more than a century. The clouds of our past journey have disappeared—gloomy prepossessions, obloquy, passion; a cheerful aspect of heaven above, and earth below, meets our eyes. The ruggedness and precipices of our past way have ceased; its penal annoyances, its legal perplexities, its covert persecutions; and

fair open dealing, generous sympathy, and friendly countenance, cheer our future prospects. What, then, shall these be?

It is rash and dangerous to pry into futurity, and pretend to unravel its hidden ways. But no rashness, no danger can there be in saying that its prospects are most hopeful. If, from the time when the episcopal rule was again restored till now, so much has been done, that the overflowing granary bears a better proportion to the few measures of seed-corn that produced its treasures, than the great things now accomplished do to the small beginnings from which they sprung, then, surely, a double power and a double energy, exercised upon these greater elements now in action, cannot fail to lead to results still more glorious, and still more blessed. It should be hereafter, methinks, a harvest, such as would be produced were those loaded granaries emptied over the land. Where, before, one laboured over a territory beyond his grasp, however strong, there shall be found two engaged on the same task, able to inspect minutely what before could be only cursorily viewed; to correct what before escaped the eye, to cultivate with assiduity what before could be but slightly touched; to admonish, to instruct, to reprove, to discharge every duty of the episcopal office, with an assiduity hitherto incompatible with the mere physical strength of man. Have we not, then, reason to expect a return for such labour, not merely calculated upon numerical strength, but with the elements included, of all the present advantages beyond the past, all the accumulated fruits of the last hundred years' toil?

Yes. I think it must be answered by all that love their country in the charity of true religion, that even upon human calculations, the function which to-day brings us together, is a source of bright hope, a harbinger of better days, an instalment of the promised benefits, part paid, part outstanding yet, which an increased episcopal body

secures to our religion at home. To what extent, I leave in the hands of God, and will not presume to search into His counsels. Whether there yet remain long days of patient trial and labour unrequited to the full ; whether another protracted term of further preparation will be wanted, till a third great crisis come, assimilating us still further to the episcopacy of other churches abroad, He best knoweth, to whose guidance we may implicitly trust our course. But we shall, at least, be animated to more generous endeavours, spurred on in the race, as men determined to win the prize ; be valiant in fight, as soldiers who do not idly beat the air. We will, with our episcopacy, redouble our prayers, our tears, and our works of piety, before God and men ; we will proportion our efforts to our prospects, and draw down a double grace and a double blessing upon the future that awaits us.

Are there any present whose hearts, estranged from ours in faith, respond not to the augury ? who fear, rather than hope, what I have unaffectedly expressed ? Well, I will engage them, at least, to view with reverential interest the sacred rite about to be commenced. They will see performed ceremonies, which, by the earliest monuments of the western church, may be traced back to the apostolic age : they will see hands imposed upon the elect bishop by those who, before him, have received the same, and can trace their descent from the apostles, without a breach or flaw ; they will see the sacred chrism, symbol of strength and of grace, poured upon his head and upon his hands ; they will see the emblems of pastoral authority placed in those hands, and the first act of his new power exercised by pouring blessing upon the heads of all who seek it. The accurate preservation of so many solemn rites through centuries, some of them ages of confusion and of forgetfulness, the performance of them here, under the sanction of an authority, which three hundred years have tried in vain to proscribe and extinguish in the land, are surely matters for deep reflection, as indicative of

a power of duration, of vitality, and of unity such as no other church ever has possessed. If, then, you wish to honour primitive practices of Christianity, stand by in reverence ; if you respect the institutions of apostles, assist in silent veneration ; if you can appreciate what is sublime in meaning, divine in its purpose, dash from your minds all meaner thoughts, and worship, in fear and awe, the heavenly Spirit that has instituted and preserved it.

From you, brethren in faith and in charity, many of you witnesses before the Church of the past life and conversation of him who is now about to receive episcopal consecration, some of you perhaps to be of his future flock, partakers, through his ministry, of the measure of grace, which he shall this day and hour receive : from you we have a dearer duty to exact. By the past favour which he may have found in your eyes, by the future hopes you repose in him, I call on you in the name of God's Church, and in your country's, I entreat you to offer up deep and earnest prayer, with and for him, to the throne of grace ; that with the imposition of episcopal hands, the divine Spirit whom they represent may overshadow him with His protecting wings, to shield him from the assaults of invisible foes, and to crown him with the virtues that become his state ; and that the oil of gladness, the spiritual unction for spiritual warfare, the consecrating chrism of His sevenfold gifts may be poured through his heart, making him a prophet to his people, a ruler to his flock, the imitator and follower of the one true Anointed of God. Pray that the staff in his hands may be used in firm but gentle rule, a support to his own feet, and a director of others steps ; that the mitre on his brow may be a helmet of invulnerable orthodoxy in warfare, a crown of honour and glory in peace ; that his feet may be strengthened to bear glad tidings to the mountain tops, and his hands filled with blessings to scatter over the fertile valleys ; that he may walk in holiness, preach by example as by word, and persevere in all godliness till he repose in peace.

And if I may presume to address a concluding word to you, my Brother in the Lord Jesus, at whose urgent request alone I could have thus ventured, before others so much more able, to give utterance to my worthless thoughts, it will be a word of encouragement rather than of exhortation. I have myself but too lately passed through the solemn rite that awaits you, with the same touching accompaniments; I have felt what it is to be surrounded at that moment by those whose charity had been indulgent to the faults, and whose love had requited the cares, of a responsibility in their regard, the friends of youth, or the spiritual children of maturer years; all this I have felt too lately and too keenly, not to be able to enter into your feelings and measure their effects. The grace of God will descend into your heart in deep and solemn, but sweet, tranquillity; and time, I am sure, will never efface from your memory the mild, yet deep, impression of this hour. It will be to you a balm in affliction, a comfort in distress, a refreshment in weariness, and a choice meditation in seasons of peace. By thought of it you will stir up within you the grace conferred on you by the imposition of hands, and you will be animated to more cheerful labour and exertion. For these there will be abundant room, God knows, in the field allotted to your care: but therein rejoice rather than despond. The wilderness made to bloom by your toil will be more pleasing to his eye than an Eden already planted; and one sheep added by your care to the flock, will be dearer to his heart than ninety-nine folded in security. To others the bishop's office is committed, to you the apostle's; theirs is more to keep, yours all to gain. Gird, then, your loins manfully for the work, for it is God's. His indeed is the work, but yours all the reward, through Jesus Christ Our Lord. *Amen.*

